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Talking Points on Lebanon for the DCI
(3 October 1983)

Political Situation

Although the cease-fire continues to hold, no progress has been made on arranging a national reconciliation conference. Developments of the past week cast considerable doubt as to whether the conference will be held any time soon.

- Druze leader Walid Junblatt, in announcing his plans to establish a Druze civil administration for the Shuf region, has revealed his pessimism concerning the likelihood of talks and his willingness to settle for a Druze mini-state if no national political solution is forthcoming.
- No progress has been made on deciding where the national reconciliation conference will be held. Syria and Saudi Arabia do not want the meeting held in Saudi Arabia. President Gemayel has so far vetoed Tunisia as a neutral site, and government opponents will not agree to meet in the Beirut area.
- Some Christian politicians may already be considering boycotting the conference. Christian hardliners are becoming increasingly suspicious of the US role in Lebanon, and some believe the US will insist that Gemayel make significant concessions to Muslims and Druze.

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Military Situation

The Lebanese Army continues to exchange sporadic fire with various militias; the Druze in the Shuf, and the Shia Amal militia in Beirut's southern suburbs. The absence of neutral observers means there is no one to police the cease-fire effectively.

- There is, however, no immediate threat of renewed hostilities at the level of last month.

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The Army acquitted itself well during the recent fighting in the Shuf, but its ability to hold together remains a prime concern.

- The confessional divisions of Lebanese society at large are reflected in the Army.
- The officer corps is about 55 percent Christian and 45 percent Muslim, while the enlisted ranks are about 55 percent Muslims. Among the Muslims, Shia probably are the majority.

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If the national reconciliation talks drag on without producing significant movement, all parties are going to view a breakdown of the cease-fire as increasingly likely.

- Soldiers of all confessional groups will be under increasing pressure from their families to desert and come home.
- Desertions from the Army could snowball, weakening the government to the point where it could no longer maintain its authority even in the greater Beirut area.
- According to the Druze, 600 Lebanese Army officers and enlisted men, reportedly largely Druze, have recently deserted.

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Prospects

If a national reconciliation conference is held, it is likely to break down because of conflicting demands among confessional groups.

- Syria will urge Muslims and Druze to press for their maximum demands.
- Maronite Christians--particularly the Phalange Party and Lebanese Forces militia leaders--will resist reforms that significantly reduce Christian influence.

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The Gemayel government, as long as the Lebanese Army holds together, could retain control over the greater Beirut area.

- It would have to contend with efforts to create autonomous Maronite and Druze heartlands and continued Syrian and Israeli occupation.
- It would face tough going if it tried to assert control over Beirut's southern suburbs now dominated by the Shia militias. The threat of a Shia uprising will keep much of the Army pinned down near Beirut, and make it impossible for the government to launch an offensive against Druze positions in the Shuf and Alayh districts.
- A rough balance of power could emerge and this situation, while far from ideal, could endure for an extended period.

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Syria's key goals in Lebanon are a government responsive to its interests and the minimizing of Israeli influence in the country.

- Damascus will continue to support its allies and surrogates in Lebanon to weaken the government and force it to reach an accommodation with Syria.

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- Assad can use either indirect military pressure or political negotiations to keep the government and the Christians on the defensive indefinitely. [redacted]

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Syria is likely to avoid a direct military confrontation with the United States in Lebanon.

- Assad almost certainly believes he can attain his objectives without significant direct Syrian military involvement. [redacted]

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Damascus, not Moscow, determines Syrian policy in Lebanon, but Soviet support reinforces Assad's confidence.

- Moscow has a strong interest in having the US military presence in Lebanon removed, or be seen as ineffective.
- The Soviets would prefer that the level of conflict remain low so that a Syria-US or Syrian-Israeli confrontation is avoided.
- We do not envision direct Soviet military support to Syria in the event of a major escalation in Lebanon, but Soviet advisers could assist Syrian air defense units.

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Israel's primary goal in Lebanon is to protect the security of its northern border and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian or Syrian presence in southern Lebanon.

- We believe Israel can maintain its current positions in Lebanon with minimum force--about 8,000 troops.
- Although the Israelis hope to avoid military involvement north of the Awwali River, they will respond to specific Palestinian or Syrian provocations with air strikes or artillery.
- A Syrian drive on Beirut or the reappearance of large numbers of PLO fighters there could lead to an Israeli military move back into the Shuf or Beirut area. [redacted]

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